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SUBJECT: BLAIR-CHIRAC MEET, LOOKING PAST DISAGREEMENTS TO THE FUTURE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for Reaso

ns 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) In an October 7 meeting between EUR PDAS Kurt Volker and French MFA Director for European Cooperation, Gilles Briatta, Briatta spoke about the discussion that took place earlier in the day between British PM Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac. Briatta said that during their meeting Blair thanked Chirac for his work to ensure that Turkey would begin EU accession talks and that Blair wanted to "bring closure to prior disagreements and look to the future." While the meeting's purpose, he said, was for Blair to discuss the upcoming informal October summit and to "straighten out" EU budgetary matters, the general goal of the meeting was to determine whether the French would try to derail the UK presidency after recent, much publicized, disagreements. Briatta said that Chirac assured Blair that France would not play the role of spoiler, adding that the British EU presidency needed to succeed if Europe was going to succeed.

12. (C) With regards to the EU budget, Briatta said that the indeterminate outcome of the German elections, which, he believed, the UK had neither expected nor desired, diminished the leverage the UK thought it would have. He added that France, however, understood that it cannot go back to its original budget plan and predicted that, in the end, the budget would satisfy France's requirements yet contain enough modifications to allow the UK to look good or "save face." He added that he was sure that Blair had a "Plan B" and speculated that something close, but not identical, to the "Luxembourg compromise" might emerge as the mutually acceptable outcome. (Note: The German Ambassador offered a similar comment in a September 27 meeting with Ambassador Stapleton.)

13. (C) With the EU Commission in a weakened state, Briatta said, both France and the UK understood the importance of a good bilateral relationship and that the two countries meet "all the time." He said that the EU presidency has and would continue to prove difficult for the UK because it is a powerful country and therefore an easy target for criticism by smaller member states.

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